

Chapter three

3

Driver Safety & Rules

For every driver, safety should be the priority. This chapter covers two critical laws concerning driving safety.

Seat Belt Law

The New Jersey seat belt law requires all front-seat occupants of passenger vehicles operated in New Jersey to wear a seat belt system. The driver is responsible for enforcing the seat belt law for passengers under 18-years-old. Front-seat passengers older than 18 are responsible for themselves. Additionally, drivers with Graduated Driver License (GDL) permits must require all passengers seated anywhere in the vehicle to use seat belts.

Seat belts help in a number of ways:

- They keep passengers from being thrown from a car in a collision.
- They prevent passengers from hitting the dashboard or windshield during severe braking or a collision.
- They keep passengers from sliding on the seat during sudden stops and turns.
- They prevent the driver from sliding off the seat and losing control of the car.

Tips for seat belt use:

- Buckle up with lap and shoulder belts on every trip. (Air bags are supplemental protection.)
- Wear the lap belt under the abdomen and low across the hips. The shoulder belt should come over the collarbone away from the neck. It should cross over the breastbone. In most new cars, the shoulder belt can be adjusted to improve fit.
- Know how to adjust and release seat belts.
- Buckle seat belts if riding in the back seat. This keeps riders from falling forward.
- Never put more than one person in one seat belt.

Passenger automobiles manufactured before July 1, 1966 are exempt from the New Jersey seat belt law. Vehicles not required to be equipped with seat belt systems under federal law are also exempt. Drivers or passengers unable to wear a seat belt system because of a medical condition can be exempted from the law with written verification by a licensed doctor.

Car Seats

When riding in a car, children should be held in place by a restraint system that meets all Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards. Look for a label on the restraint system that reads: "This child restraint system conforms to all applicable Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards." (See the Child Restraint Law in this chapter.)

Whenever possible, child car safety seats should be placed in the back seat. If the car does not have a back seat, child car safety seats may be placed in the front seat. But the front seat should be moved as far away as possible from the dashboard. In addition, never place a rear-facing infant safety seat in the front seat of a vehicle that has a front passenger-side air bag.

While a convertible child safety seat is designed to face forward once a child has reached the age of one AND is at least 20 pounds, an infant seat must never face forward. Be sure to check the car seat label to learn the size and weight of the child that the seat is designed to protect.

Children 12 and under should ride in the back seat of a vehicle.

For more information on child car seats, call the NJ Division of Highway Traffic Safety at (800) 422-3750.

Child Restraint Law

New Jersey requires the driver and all front seat passengers to wear seat belts. Additionally, passengers under eight years of age who weigh more than 80 pounds and all passengers who are least eight years of age but less than 18 years of age must wear seat belts wherever they sit in a motor vehicle.

Passengers under eight years of age who weigh less than 80 pounds must be secured in a child passenger restraint system or booster seat in the rear seat of the motor vehicle. If there is no rear seat, the child passenger restraint system or booster seat may be used in the front seat. (However, never place a rear-facing infant safety seat in the front seat of a vehicle that has a front passenger-side air bag, unless the vehicle's passenger-side air bag can be disabled.) When the number of children under the age of five exceeds the number of safety belts available in a vehicle, the unbelted children must ride in the rear seat.

The driver is responsible for all passengers under 18 years of age. Passengers 18 and over are responsible for themselves.

Air Bags

Air bags are standard equipment in almost all new cars. They are designed to supplement safety belts. Air bags are identified on the steering wheel and dashboard panel with one of the following indicators: Air Bag, SRS (Supplemental Restraint System), or SIR (Supplemental Inflatable Restraint).

Air bag cut-off switches are allowed in automobiles with no back seats, but there are certain medical, physical and age-related conditions for drivers or passengers that must be met.

For more information about the air bag on-off switch in specific vehicles, call the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration at (800) 424-9393. All vehicles with an air bag will have the words “air bag,” or the abbreviation “SRS” or “SIR” on the steering wheel or dashboard panel. Vehicle manufacturers may also mark sun visors, sides of open door frames or owner manuals with warning labels.

Children of any age are safest when belted properly in the back seat of a passenger vehicle. This is most important if a vehicle is equipped with a passenger-side air bag.

Additionally, always put an infant in a rear-facing infant child safety seat in the back seat of a car equipped with air bags; always be sure that children 12 years old and younger ride in the back seat of any passenger vehicle.

Car Condition

Always check a vehicle’s condition before driving it. Immediate repairs for the following items may be necessary:

- **Reverse lights** should light when driving in reverse. Make sure these lights are working. (New Jersey law prohibits reverse lights from being on while a car is moving forward.)

- **Brakes** should be smooth and stop a car quickly when necessary. When braking, if a car pulls to one way, have the brakes checked. Have the brakes checked if an unusual sound occurs when the brakes are used. Test conventional disc and drum brakes by pressing gently on the brake pedal. Test anti-lock brakes with steady pressure on the brake pedal.

- **Brake lights** help prevent accidents. Always replace broken bulbs immediately. Replace broken brake light covers, which may cause a glare that affects other drivers.

- **Headlights** help prevent accidents. Always replace broken dim and bright beams immediately.

- **The horn** should not be overused, but check it occasionally to make sure it works. Tap the horn when coming out of a blind alley, curve or driveway, and in certain passing situations.

- On straight, level roads, **steering** a car on a straight course should be easy. There should be no vibration, or shimmy, and the car should always respond to turns without much play in the steering wheel.

- **Taillights** help prevent accidents by signaling other drivers in the dark, and should always be kept in working order.

- **Tires** should never have bumps, cuts or bad tread, all of which could cause a blow out. There should be no unusual thumping. Tire pressure should be checked often when the weather is cold. Look in a vehicle's owner's manual for correct tire pressure and correct tires for individual vehicles. Do not drive on tires that have less than 1/16 of an inch of tread, about the edge of a dime.

- **Turn signals'** clicking sound should be audible, and off-and-on flashing should be visible, to the driver. Immediate repairs are necessary if the signals do not work properly. In the event immediate repairs are not possible, use hand signals.

- **The windshield** should not have chips or cracks in it. It should always be clean inside and out. Always make sure windshield wipers are working. New Jersey law prohibits most drivers from adding tint to windshields and front-side windows.

Starting a Parked Car

Before getting into a car to drive, look behind and in front of the car to check for children playing, animals, bottles or anything else that could be injured or broken.

Also:

- Make sure all windows are clean and there is nothing blocking lines of sight.

- Adjust the seat so all pedals and controls are easily reached.

- Adjust inside and outside mirrors to reduce blind spots.

- Fasten safety belts and shoulder harnesses, adjusting them for firmness and comfort.

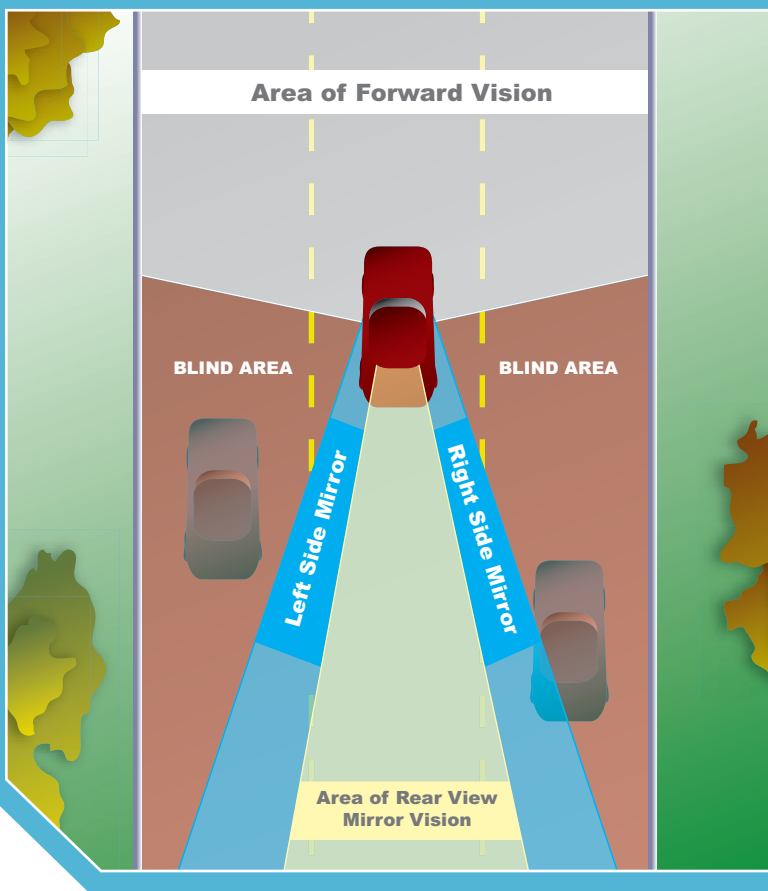
- Make sure the car is in park or neutral gear and the parking brake is set.

Keep good posture while driving. A properly seated driver should be able to see clearly and glance to the rear, via the rear-view mirror or with a twist of the neck.

Adjust eyeglasses. More than 95 percent of all information necessary for safe driving is visual information. To fight glare at night, avoid wearing color lenses, which can distort color. Anti-reflective lenses work better and help eliminate internal reflection in eyeglasses and could help night driving.

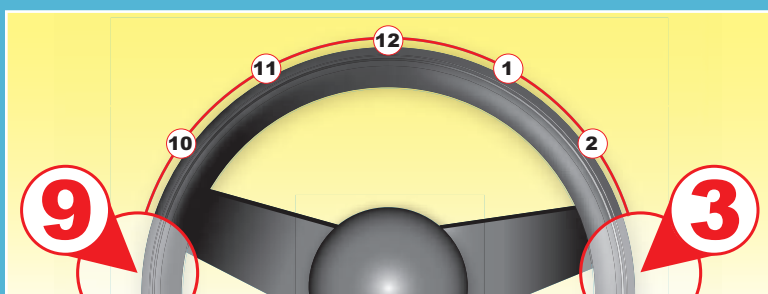
Blind spots are areas hidden from a driver's view. Correctly adjusted mirrors help reduce blind spots. Adjust the outside mirror so that the tip of the front door handle is in view in the lower right of the mirror, which provides a view of part of the lanes of traffic to the left and rear of the car.

To check mirrors, allow a vehicle to pass on the left. As it disappears from the inside rearview mirror, its front bumper should be visible in the outside mirror.



Check for less-conspicuous vehicles, such as bicycles and mopeds, before moving the vehicle. Always make sure the path is clear. Use the rearview mirror and turn to look around before signaling and driving.

Steering



For normal driving, keep both hands on the upper half of the wheel. Hold the wheel as steady as possible while increasing speed. Keep the car in the center of the lane. Keep to the right on a two-lane road with oncoming traffic in the other lane. The best way to approach a curve in the road is to slow down before entering the curve. When driving around a curve, your vehicle may tend to keep going straight, which is why the proper grip of the steering wheel is needed.

Keep a firm, but not too-tight, grip. Think of the steering wheel as the face of a clock. In normal driving, hands should be kept at 9 and 3 o'clock. For safety, keep both hands on the wheel at all times, except when shifting gears or giving hand signals.

Speed Control

Certain speed control guidelines should be used for safe driving. Start slowly, gradually increasing speed until safely within the legal speed limit and flow of traffic. On open roads, keep a steady, legal speed. When necessary, decrease speed slowly.

Press the gas pedal slowly. This gives other drivers and pedestrians a chance to react accordingly. To check speed, glance quickly at the speedometer. With practice will come the ability to judge correct gas-pedal pressure for any speed.

Stopping Distances

There is no absolute formula to judge stopping distance. It depends on numerous factors, including:

- individual reaction time
- weather and road conditions
- vehicle weight
- brake conditions
- condition and type of tires
- roadway conditions
- speed

Stopping Distances on Dry Surfaces for Passenger Cars (in feet)

Speed mph	Reaction Distance	Braking Distance	Total
10	11	6	17
20	22	25	47
30	33	55	88
40	44	105	149
50	55	188	243
60	66	300	366
70	77	455	532

• Based on $\frac{3}{4}$ seconds reaction time, which is typical for most drivers under normal traffic conditions.

Proper Braking

The use of brakes may seem simple, but it is not. A driver should always know what type of braking system a vehicle uses. It could be a conventional drum and disc system, or an anti-lock system (ABS). Whether the vehicle is front- or rear-wheel drive does not determine proper braking.

New drivers often violently push the brake pedal, even if there is no emergency. This is a mistake. This will jerk the vehicle to a stop

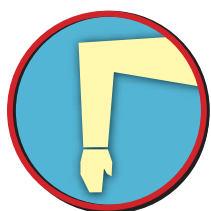
and wear out the brakes and tires prematurely. Apply gentle pressure to the brake pedal to bring the vehicle to a controlled stop. With ABS, do not pump the brakes or violently jerk the steering wheel when braking. This may cause an ABS vehicle to go out of control, even at 35 mph on dry pavement. Practice hard braking and steering in an empty parking lot or other safe, open space.

Use the right foot for both accelerating and braking. If the vehicle is manual, use the left foot for the clutch.

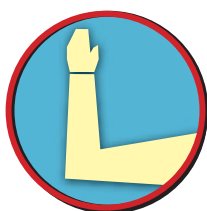
Driver Signals

Always give a proper signal when changing directions or lanes, or for stopping or slowing down. Most cars have turn signals. Always use the turn signals. Turn on turn signals at least 100 feet before turning. Be sure to cancel these signals after making a turn. Not doing so might mislead other drivers.

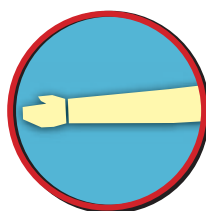
New Jersey law requires that drivers know the correct hand signals for stopping and turning, which are standard in all states. A driver's arm must be well out of the window when giving the following signals:



Stop or Slow



Right Turn



Left Turn

Another signal is the horn. The horn is a warning signal, calling attention to what a driver is doing. Drivers may sound their horn when passing another vehicle when not in a business or residential zone. Only emergency vehicles may use sirens, whistles and bells.

Driving in Reverse

Before driving in reverse, be sure the path is clear by checking all mirrors and turning to check. The view to the back of the vehicle is limited, so be very careful. In reverse, steering the wheel to the right moves the car to the right; steering to the left moves the car to the left. A steering wheel not turned to the right or left will move the car straight backward when in reverse.

The driver's head and body should be turned back and to the right to get the clearest view possible. Placing the right hand and arm over the back of the front passenger seat and grasping the top of the steering wheel with the left hand will help accomplish this.

It is important to remember that when driving in reverse, the front of the car will swing in the opposite direction of a turn. Do not depend on mirrors alone as a guide to driving in reverse. Always drive in reverse slowly.

This skill must be mastered in order to pass the road portion of the driving test.

Parking

Always set the hand brake and put the car in park, or, with a manual transmission, in reverse or a low gear.

There are important steps to take when parking on a street with a curb:

When parking on a decline facing downhill, to ensure the vehicle does not roll into traffic if the parking brake fails, turn the wheels toward the curb and shift into park, or reverse with a manual transmission.

When parking on an incline facing uphill, to ensure the vehicle does not roll into traffic if the parking brake fails, turn the wheels away from the curb and shift into park, or a low gear with a manual transmission.

If there are no curbs, turn the wheels toward the edge of the road when parking on a decline (facing downhill) or an incline (facing uphill).

Angle Parking

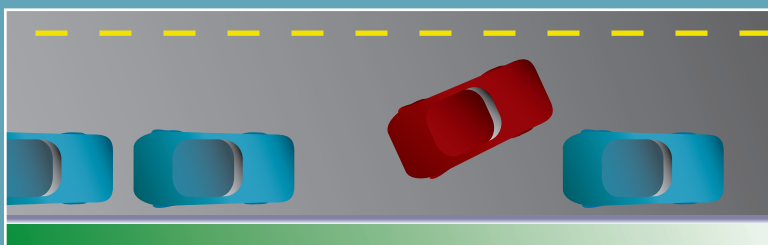
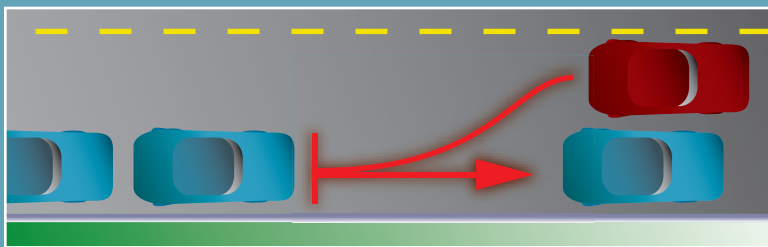
Angle parking is often used in parking lots of shopping centers, and sometimes at storefront curbs. To enter an angle parking space on the right, first watch for traffic ahead and behind. Then, signal and begin to slow down. Make sure the rear of the car will clear any parked car. Steer sharply into the parking space, and then straighten the wheels to center the car in the space. Put the car in park, or in reverse with a manual transmission.

To back out of an angle parking space, make sure there is no person or object behind the vehicle. Back up slowly once it has been determined there is no traffic. The driver may tap the horn to warn nearby pedestrians. Stop and look over cars parked in nearby angle spaces. Back slowly until the left front wheel passes the rear bumper of the car parked on the left. Straighten the wheels when entering the traffic lane.

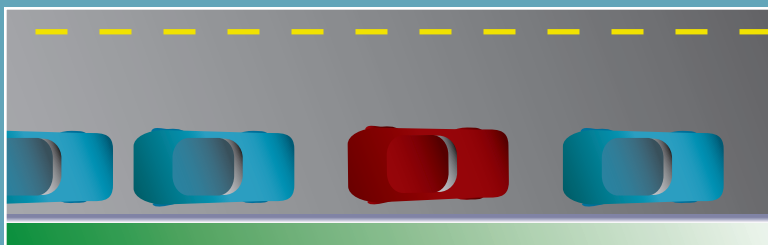
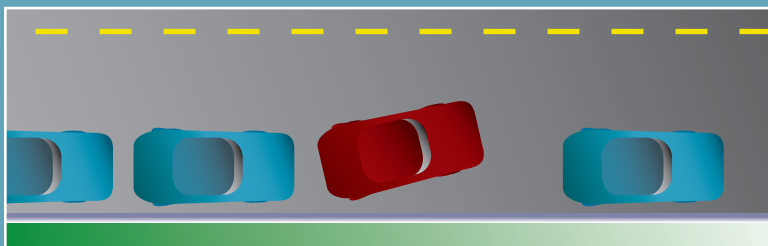
Parallel Parking

Parallel parking is common on city streets. It is a skill motorists must possess to pass the road test portion of the driver test. Parallel parking is easiest when a driver backs in slowly and smoothly.

To parallel park, find a space large enough for the vehicle. Properly signal. Pull alongside, or parallel, about two to four feet from the parked car in front. Before backing up, turn and check to see that there is no obstruction. Remember, the front end of the vehicle will swing out, possibly into traffic, when backing up and turning.



When the front of the car has cleared the rear bumper of the parked car in front, stop. Check the angle. Make sure the right back wheel has not hit the curb. Now, turn the steering wheel all the way to the left while beginning to back slowly. Now, the front end of the car will swing toward the parked car in front. Make sure to clear the back bumper of the parked car.



When the car is in line, stop. Make sure not to hit the car behind. Straighten the steering wheel and pull forward until the car is in the center of the parking space. State law prohibits parking farther than six inches from the curb. Make sure the tires of the car are no more than six inches from the curb.

Practice makes parallel parking easier. **New drivers should practice often in an empty parking lot.** Use flags or markers 25 feet apart to show where the other cars would be.